

VZCZCXRO6873
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #1071/01 0861905
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 271905Z MAR 07
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0412
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001071

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/27/17
TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PINR](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: SADR CITY: NO PLACE FOR A MODERATE

Classified By: BAGHDAD PRT LEADER JOE GREGOIRE. REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

[1](#)1. (U) This is a Baghdad PRT Reporting Cable.

[1](#)2. (C) Summary: The political tension brewing in Sadr City has reached a tipping point, as 19 members of Sadr City local councils have decided to flee to Kurdistan rather than risk being targeted by JAM for their moderate stance on cooperating with USG entities. This development follows the attempted assassination of a local mayor in Sadr City, a declaration among Sadrism-aligned council members calling for a shut-down of local council operations, and threats against fellow council members who sought a cooperative stance towards MNF units and a supportive attitude towards the Baghdad Security Plan. We plan to meet with Mueen Al-Khadimy, the Chairman of the Baghdad Provincial Council on or about April 2 to discuss his efforts to help turn things around in Sadr City. End summary.

Fault lines in Sadr City

[1](#)3. (C) The Sadr City District Council (DC), one of nine district councils in the city of Baghdad, has a history of conflict with Sadrism-influenced politics. Like all other local councils created under the CPA, its original membership included local leaders who were generally independent of the major party organizations operating in Iraq. Unfortunately, its ability to function as a service-providing entity in Sadr City made it a competitor to local Sadr Bureau (OMS) offices. Eventually discovering that they couldn't beat 'em, the Sadristes decided to join 'em. Over time, Sadrist influence on the DC has grown through membership changes, the meddling of provincial-level Sadrist leaders and the growing organizational ability of those pursuing a Sadrist agenda. Recently, internal elections for a new chairman put a high-placed Sadrist into that position. Many original members, who have maintained close relationships with army civil affairs and PRT personnel throughout these changes, bemoan the Sadrist encroachment upon their council and have reported with increasing frequency their concerns that the DC is becoming an instrument of OMS.

[1](#)4. (C) The core group of these 'secular moderates', as they refer to themselves, recently met with PRToff to discuss their strategy to regain control of the DC. A key component of that strategy was the reinvigorated presence of MNF at their weekly meetings. Due to recent operations, no MNF unit has been engaging consistently with local councils in Sadr City for the past several months. During this time, Sadrist influence has grown and Abd al-Hassan al-Kaby was elected chairman, forcing out Hassan Shema, the long-time independent chairman.

[1](#)5. (C) At this meeting, on March 13, the four Sadr City council members spoke about their desire to see better cooperation between the council and MNF units, and their opinion that despite what some rabble-rousers said, most

regular people in Sadr City actually supported the Baghdad Security Plan, and looked to have more IA, IP and US military presence in their neighborhoods.

Al-Duraji has the 'X'

¶16. (C) When asked about the efficacy of Raheem al-Duraji, the qa'im makam of the northern half of Sadr City, one of the members, Ali Swadi said that al-Duraji was widely known to be a possible JAM target because of his role as an interlocutor between MNF and local municipal authorities. (Comment: A qa'im makam, commonly known as a local 'mayor', is an executive official who serves as the Governor's agent in various districts of Baghdad. It is known that many of Baghdad's qa'im makams share Baghdad Governor Hussein al-Tahan's Badr Organization affiliation, but in al-Duraji's case, it seems as though he has been able to deal in both Badr and Sadrist camps.) Swadi and the others said they feared dealing with al-Duraji because they might invoke the wrath of the more extremist Sadrists, like al-Kaby, who did not look favorably upon al-Duraji's relationship with MNF. Hassan Shema said that the members were putting themselves at risk just for meeting with PRToff, but being seen cooperating with al-Duraji would definitely mean that they would have the 'X' put on them, just like al-Duraji.

¶17. (C) On March 15, gunmen ambushed al-Duraji near his office in Sadr City, wounding him and killing a member of his security detail.

A House Divided?

BAGHDAD 00001071 002 OF 002

¶18. (C) Reports from Ali Swadi, Hassan Shema and other council members over the past week seemed to indicate that there was a divide in the Sadrist community over the degree to which cooperation with USG was permissible. A directive to all local councils in Sadr City to cease operations, reportedly from MAS, was not uniformly respected. Sadr City DC Chairman al-Kaby held a meeting on March 19 where members discussed taking practical steps towards breaking off contact with MNF and protesting the presence of a joint security station in Sadr City. Those not in agreement with al-Kaby's agenda remained quiet, however, because it was made clear that anyone who chose to reach out to MNF would be targeted by JAM.

¶19. (C) The attempt on al-Duraji could be seen as the work of extremists trying to sever all ties between USG and 'collaborators', but another interpretation would suggest that it could be the work of an entrepreneurial JAM faction attempting to exert authority over USG projects in Sadr City. There are indications that al-Kaby might be intending to fill the vacuum left by a sidelined al-Duraji, although possibly not so much to collaborate with USG, but to prevent anyone else (i.e. a non-Sadrist) from filling that role in Sadr City.

¶19. (C) Engagements with prominent Sadrists in provincial government also indicated possible splits in the Sadrist camp. Deputy Governor Qassim N'ima said that many Sadrists saw no problem working with al-Duraji, and that he was performing an important role with his negotiations. When asked about Sadrists possibly breaking off relations with USG, N'ima explained that within Sadrist circles there were of course some that adamantly rejected cooperation, but that it was widely acceptable to deal with USG entities in the course of performing one's official duties. N'ima offered to reach out to find Sadrists willing to bridge the gap with MNF.

¶10. (C) A follow-up phone call to the Deputy Governor had him stating that he did not want to suggest the name of anyone willing to step forward at this time. The context of his comments made it apparent that he had been rebuked by powerful members of his organization. Although willing to continue engagements himself, N'ima's comments indicate that the hardliners are gaining the upper-hand in the debate among Sadrists over cooperation with USG.

Time to go

¶11. (C) Deciding that enough is enough, Ali Swadi and 18 other members of Sadr City local councils left Sadr City for Suleimaniya on March 25, stating that they feared for their lives and that their moderate, cooperative stance on engaging with MNF and PRT was putting them at risk from JAM reprisals. Swadi said that they were assisted by Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih. According to Swadi, Salih blasted the current GOI for not having any idea on how to engage with Sadrists or any plan to facilitate USG efforts in Sadr City.

Comment

¶12. (C) The departure of a large group of moderate voices from Sadr City politics complicates efforts to implement the Baghdad Security Plan, as hardliners will no doubt aggressively counter efforts to emplace and operate joint security stations. MNF units in the area will find increasing difficulty in getting projects implemented through uncooperative councils and municipal authorities. Even direct dealings with moderate Sadrists will become more problematic, as they become targeted by the more intransigent within their organization. While it may be possible to negotiate and work in partnership with some of the Sadrist elite in Sadr City, a seemingly recent upsurge in JAM-related activity in Baghdad indicates that many see confrontation as the better route to their goals than cooperation.

¶13. (C) Comment, continued. PRT's Team Leader and Governance team met with PC Chairman Mueen Al-Khadimy on March 26 to discuss a way forward for political support to the Baghdad Security Plan in Sadr City. Mueen explained that violence and threats had risen of late and council members are reluctant to engage Coalition authorities, however he would nonetheless try to reach out to Sadr City DC officials to facilitate Coalition activity in the district. We plan to meet with Mueen early during the week of April 1 to press for positive re-engagement. End comment.
SPECKHARD